

Social scientists have noted some basic shifts in public attitudes toward the environment in recent years (Dunlap and Van Liere 1979, Cotgrove 1984, Milbrath 1984). They describe the transition from a dominant social paradigm (DSP) to a new environmental paradigm (NEP). According to Milbrath (1984) the DSP was characterized by the following: lower evaluation of nature; compassion only for those near and dear; acceptance of risk to maximize wealth; no recognition of limits to growth; belief that the present society was preferable (e.g., based on materialism and competition); and a system of politics that relied on experts and market control. This DSP formed the basis for much of the industrial and economic growth that is now seen as a cause of environmental problems.

The DSP began to give way to the NEP in recent years, especially with the rise of the environmental movement. Milbrath (1984) characterizes this NEP, as follows: high valuation of nature for its own sake (environmental protection over economic growth); generalized compassion toward other species, other cultures, and future generations; more careful planning and action to control risk; recognition of limits to growth; belief in the need for a new society (e.g., based on simpler lifestyles and cooperation); and new politics that are more consultative and participatory. The transition to this NEP is, by no means, complete. Many people still cling to the DSP. People who are most likely to support the NEP tend to be younger, more liberal, and more highly educated. They hold different values, attitudes, and beliefs.

With these points in mind we now present an overview of the theoretical concepts that form the basis for our research. Figure 1 presents the major independent and dependent variables we measure in both Phases of this project. Figure 2 shows an illustrative theoretical model which represents the general types of relationships we hypothesize. For this discussion we first describe the nature of attitudes about the Albemarle-Pamlico Estuarine system. We then outline the major background characteristics we expect to be related to these attitudes. Public attitudes toward alternative management scenarios will be determined during the second year of this research.

It is important to make several points at the beginning. We do anticipate and will propose interrelationships among the different attitudes shown in Figure 1. For example, certain attitudes (e.g., about severity of problems) will influence other attitudes (e.g., about the alternative management scenarios). Knowledge about resource management and associated issues will influence individual's attitudes toward management alternatives. Because of constraints on length we do not describe all the hypothesized interrelationships among different background characteristics and attitudes. Representative examples of various models are presented.